



CHOOSING THE RIGHT DECKING MATERIAL FOR LONGEVITY AND PERFORMANCE

BY DAVE KILE

A PROFESSIONAL DECK BUILDER'S expertise goes beyond mere construction; it extends to selecting materials that guarantee longevity and customer satisfaction. The choice of decking material plays a pivotal role in determining how well a deck withstands the elements and time. In this article, we'll explore the key factors to consider when choosing decking materials for longevity and performance.

DECKING MATERIAL: A Crucial Decision

One of the foremost considerations when selecting decking materials is durability. Different materials have varying levels of resistance to weather, pests and wear-and-tear.

- **Pressure-treated wood:** A classic and cost-effective choice, pressure-treated wood is infused with chemicals that enhance its resistance to decay and insects. However, regular maintenance, including sealing and staining, is necessary to prevent moisture infiltration, warping, splitting and discoloration.
- **Composite:** Composites are a blend of wood fibers and recycled plastic that are highly resistant to moisture, insects and rot, leading to a longer lifespan compared to traditional wood. They also resist fading, staining and scratching.

- **Cedar and redwood:** These natural woods contain oils and tannins that make them resistant to rot and insects. They require regular staining and sealing to maintain their durability, preserve their color and prevent weathering.
- **Tropical hardwood:** Hardwoods are known for their extreme durability and resistance to decay, insects, and even fire. They age beautifully but require regular maintenance and have a higher price tag.

JOIST AND LEDGER PROTECTION: A Small Investment with Significant Returns

If built with wood, a deck's substructure is highly susceptible to moisture infiltration and rot. Joist protection tape serves as a barrier between the joists and the decking material. It is worth considering because it offers moisture protection for the deck's substructure, rot prevention and enhanced stability for metal fasteners.

And don't forget the ledger board. This key connection point where the deck attaches to a house is especially vulnerable to moisture, but it can be fully sealed with wider flashing tapes.

DECK DRAINAGE: A Must-Have Feature for Elevated Decks

Proper deck drainage is an often underestimated aspect of deck longevity, particularly when the deck and foundation are built with wood. Using a network of troughs and downspouts, an underdeck drainage system captures and diverts water away from the deck's surface and framing. The main benefits of adding this type of system include preventing water accumulation, protecting the substructure and providing usable space.

While there are numerous options for underdeck drainage systems, these systems largely fall into one of two categories: those that are installed beneath the substructure framing, and those that are applied above the joists. Most contractors prefer drainage systems that install above the joists between the substructure and the deck boards. This application protects the entire substructure from moisture penetration and allows for gas and electrical lines to be run safely and discreetly between the deck surface and a soffit ceiling below to power lighting, ceiling fans, barbecues, appliances and electrical components, allowing contractors to create a space with the look and function of an outdoor room.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT: Longevity through Sustainability

Homeowners are increasingly looking for sustainable decking options. Consider offering eco-friendly materials that align with these values.

- **Composite decking:** Many composite decking options incorporate recycled materials, making them both a durable and environmentally friendly choice.
- **Certified sustainable wood:** If natural wood is preferred, opt for wood that is certified by organizations like the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), indicating responsible and sustainable sourcing.

Choosing the right decking materials for longevity involves careful consideration of material durability, maintenance requirements, exposure and vulnerability to moisture, and environmental impact. The right selections combined with expert installation will ensure a beautiful and long-lasting deck that stands the test of time. **DS**

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